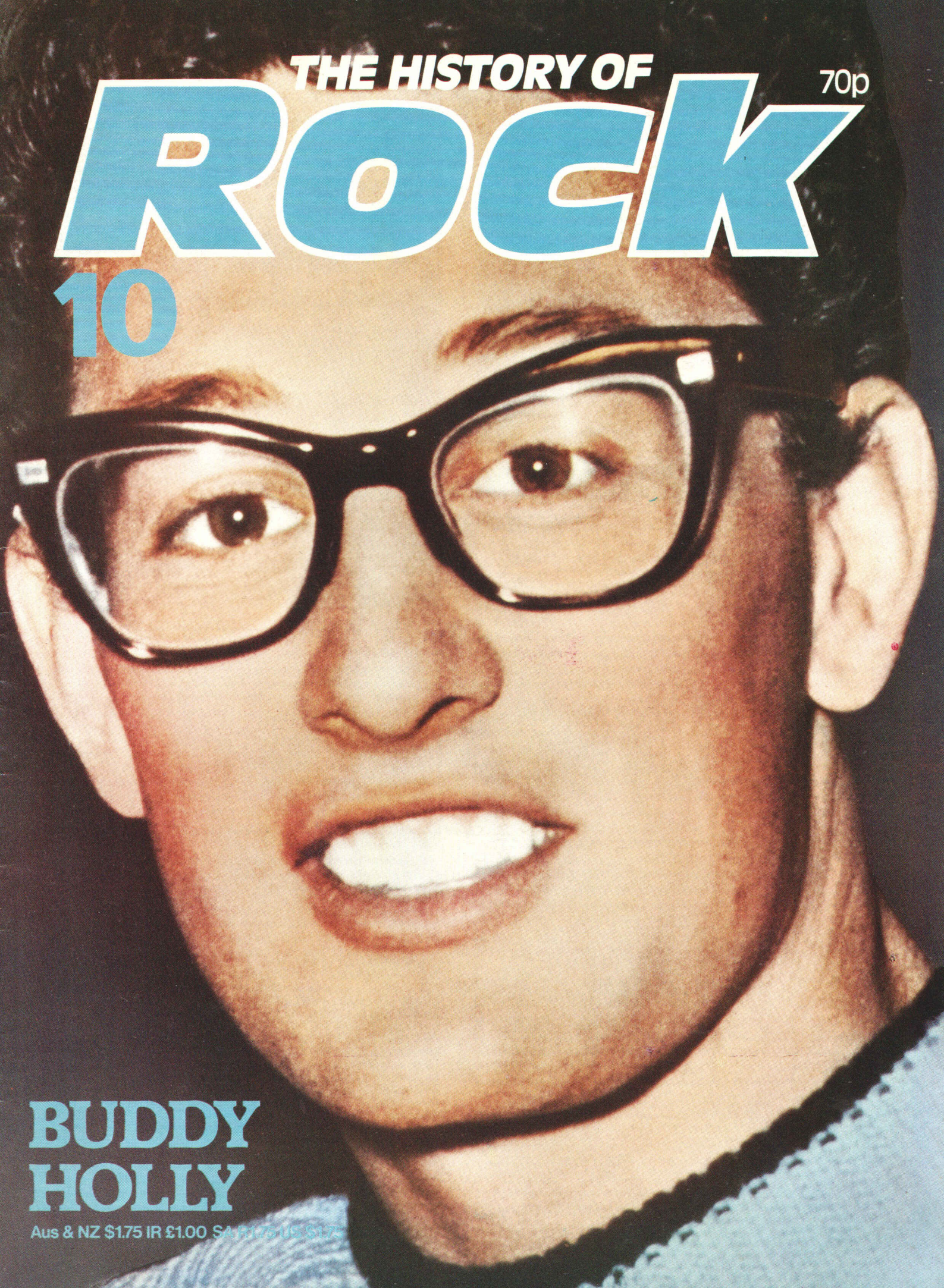
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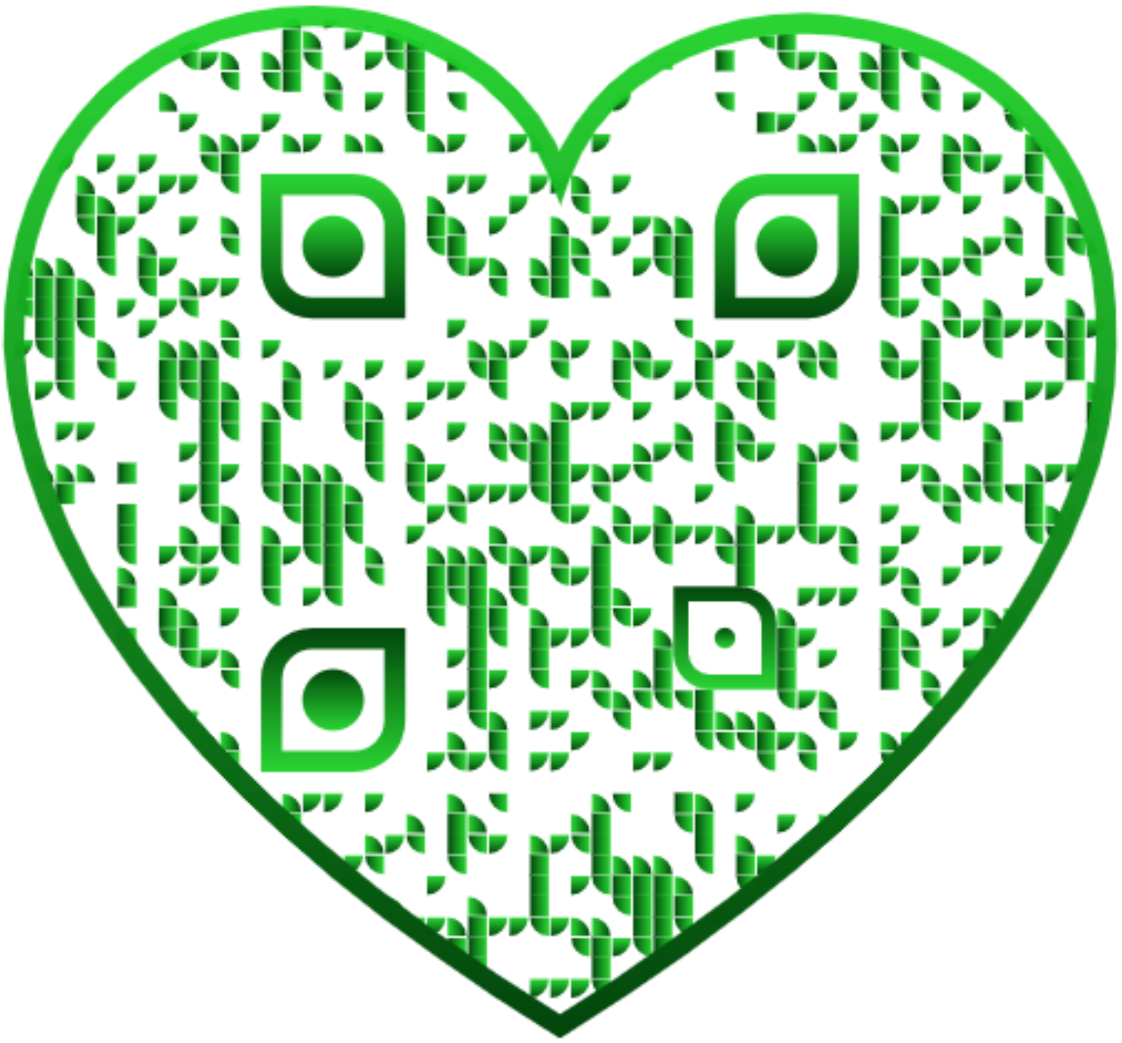

THE HISTORY OF ROCK

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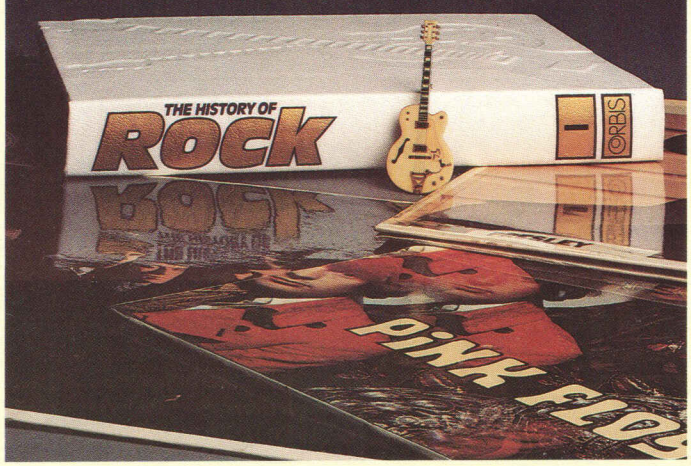

Next week's issue

The fast-growing outlets of television and the cinema provided a golden opportunity for rock to reach a larger audience in the late Fifties. Rock'n'roll radio was already an established fact, but the music was more cautiously accepted by the visual media. A key figure in rock's graduation to the screen was Alan Freed, the extrovert DJ from Cleveland who masterminded such rock'n'roll movies as *Rock Around The Clock* and *Don't Knock The Rock*. Sadly, Freed became a casualty in the payola scandal of money-for-airplay, but by then rock had established its position on the TV and cinema screens of the United States.

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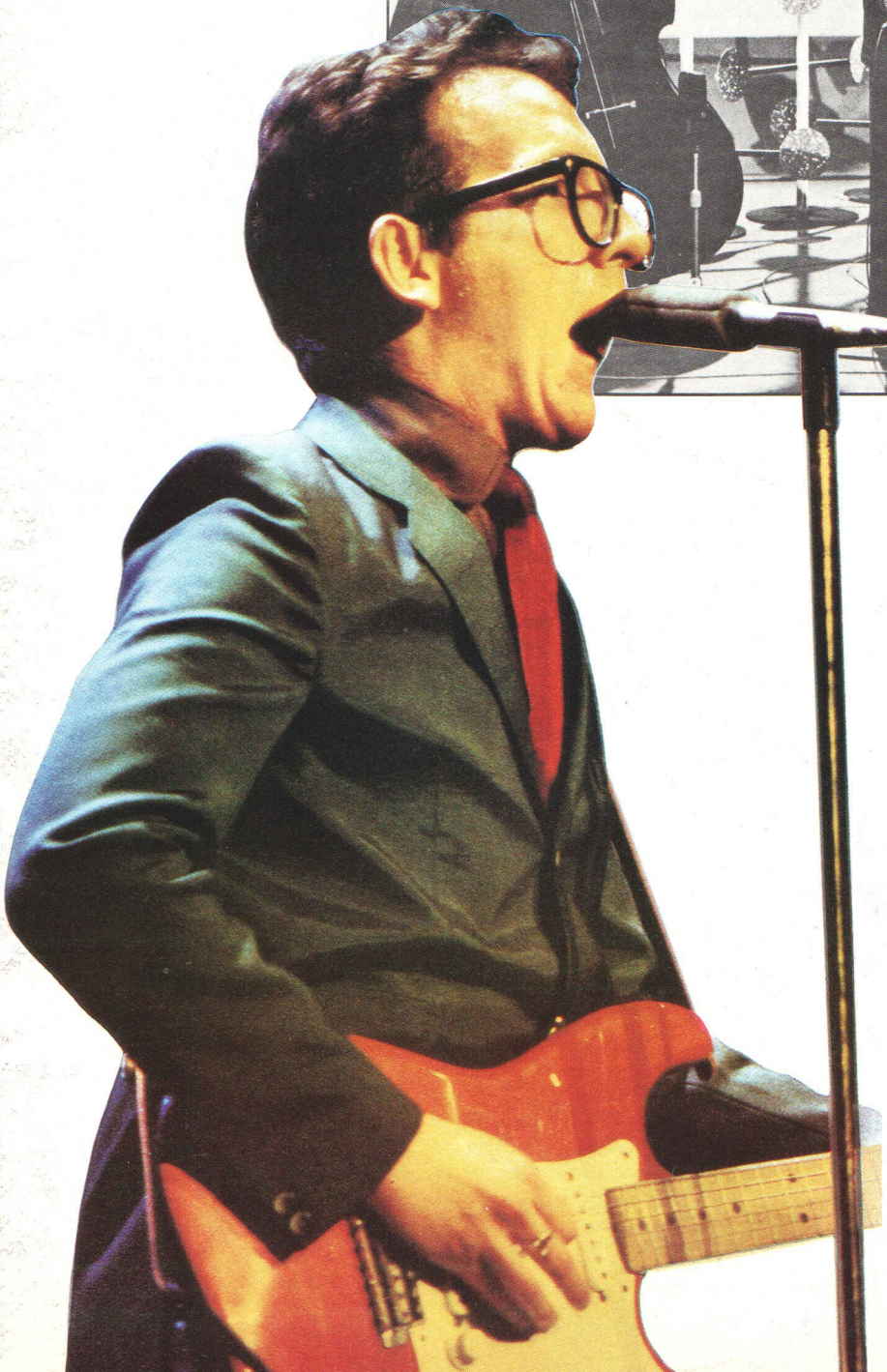
Not Fade Away

Stars may have died, but great music lives on

Buddy Holly and the Crickets in full song during a performance for the BBC in London (right). Their music was a revelation to many at the time, and has continued to influence a later generation of rock musicians. Nor was the influence purely musical: Elvis Costello for example (below) has clearly modelled his visual image on that of Holly.



On 3 February 1959 Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and the Big Bopper died in an air crash. In spite of Don McLean's valediction, the music itself did not die, but the deaths of Holly and Valens did seem to symbolise rock losing its way in the late Fifties, as two lines of musical development – Tex-Mex and Chicano – failed to grow into major styles.

The West and Southwest of the US had been important areas in the prehistory of rock. In California, the land of opportunity for black and white migrant workers in the Forties, rhythm and blues had developed in ways which prefigured rock'n'roll, and the 'Race' charts of the Forties had been dominated by the Los Angeles-based record companies. Similarly, in Texas, the 'honky-tonk' music of Ernest Tubb, the 'western swing' of Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys and the boogie of Moon Mullican ('The King of Hillbilly Piano Players') had been important precursors of what became known as rockabilly.

Tex-Mex and Chicano music

It was further east – in Memphis, Chicago and New Orleans – that rock actually took off; but for a time in the late Fifties, it did appear that the new music might find a fresh inspiration in the West and Southwest. The blend of music known as 'Tex-Mex' (a combination of Texas and *New* Mexico – the state, not the country) can be seen as a potentially important type of rock-

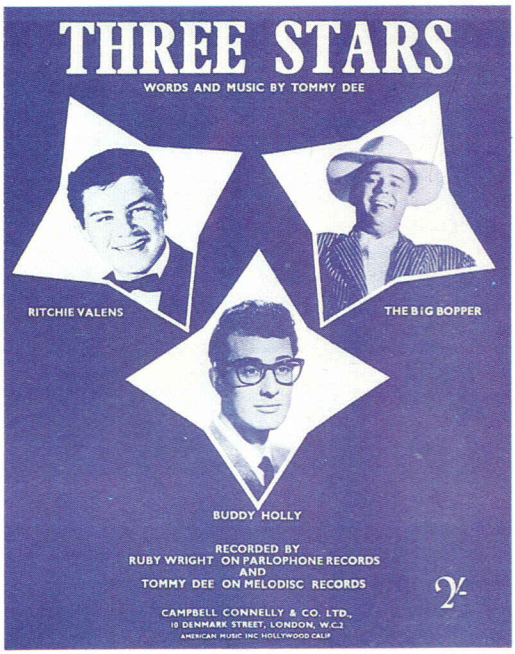
Above: Ritchie Valens – the most successful Chicano singer of the Fifties – sings at the microphone. Right: Sheet music for 'Three Stars', a maudlin tribute to the musicians killed in the plane crash of 3 February 1959.

abilly, while in California the so-called Chicano music of the Mexican community was influenced by a variety of styles – from rhythm and blues to Latin-American dances – which might have combined to produce something as distinctive and important as the New Orleans sound.

In the event, neither area was to provide a new, invigorating force. Rock in the late Fifties and early Sixties was trapped between safe formulas and commercial demands until the Beatles arrived. Why some cities and states should have become the centres of rock's development while others (in spite of seeming to possess many of the necessary background influences) did not, is a question which can never be fully explained – the vital spark, that combination of musical talent with commercial acumen and of an eager public with the right network for distribution was just not there.

There is also the additional point that by the late Fifties rock was a national music, not the regional one it had been in its infancy. Companies were looking for new stars, and promoted them on as wide a basis as possible. Buddy Holly cut his New Mexico connections in 1958, and Ritchie Valens, as an up-and-coming singer, toured Hawaii when aged 17. The long germination which had characterised some of the other regional styles was no longer possible. So, perhaps Tex-Mex and Chicano music could never have taken off; the glare of the national spotlight on the leading names would have prevented any of the nurturing of local sounds which had taken place in Memphis and New Orleans.

Nevertheless, although neither Tex-Mex nor Chicano profoundly altered the music in this period, they did have contributions to make. Chicano artists – a catch-all grouping which loosely included any singer employing a latin beat with 'ethnic' lyrics – were of limited importance in terms of influence on the course of rock music in the late Fifties and early Sixties; but Ritchie Valens' three-chord thrash through 'La Bamba' remains a staple of many a cabaret band and muzak tape today, even though few listeners associated the 17-year-old's name with it. 'La Bamba' also formed the basis for the song 'Twist And Shout', the most exciting number in the early Beatles' repertoire. Chicano music was to continue as an influence in the hands of the Sir Douglas Quintet, Freddy Fender, Trini Lopez and Chris Montez throughout the Sixties and into the Seventies.

Although 'Tex-Mex' as such never developed into a very distinctive musical style, the region did produce one of the indisputable rock greats in Buddy Holly, whose effect on later musicians was to be far-reaching. The format of Holly's group – the classic line-up of lead and rhythm guitars, bass and drums – was to have great impact in the UK; it was adopted by the Beatles, Searchers and countless other rock bands of the Sixties. The Hollies added a stand-up singer, but adopted Holly's name as their own, just as the Beatles' echoed that of his band, the Crickets. Holly's songs combined the introspection taken to its extremes by the Paul Simon/James Taylor singer-songwriters of the late Sixties with a youthful exuberance

which struck a chord of recognition in many a teenage heart.

Success from simplicity

Holly's sound developed naturally from the simplicity of the guitar-and-drums format with which he had started his performing career. Much credit for the additional (and often unconventional) sounds with which this was embellished must be ascribed to producer Norman Petty. Although more often associated with the dubious practice of overdubbing Holly's demonstration tapes for posthumous release, Petty nevertheless provided the link between Sam Phillips' rudimentary, echo-laden sound and the sophistication of studio magicians such as Phil Spector. Petty's studio devices ranged from the sublime – he pioneered the use of vocal and instrumental double-tracking on Holly's songs, notably on 'Words Of Love' – to the unconventional but highly effective hands-on-knees percussion effect on 'Everyday': his combinations produced the maximum results from minimum instrumentation. If Sam Phillips found the million-dollar white boy with the black voice

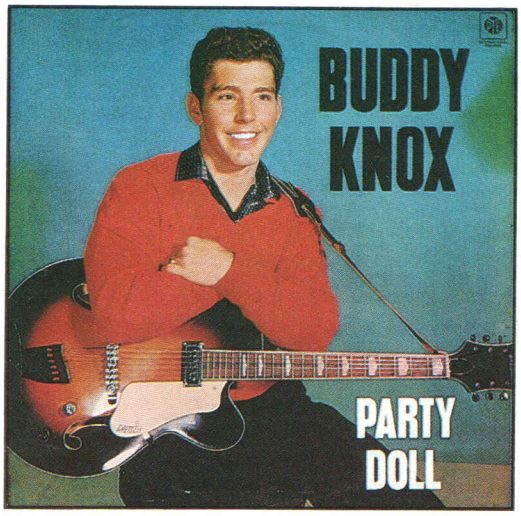
in Presley, Petty polished the nickel he found in Holly until it was one of the brightest ornaments in the US rock crown.

Petty's studio techniques also proved beneficial to the less renowned Texan Buddy Knox, the singer whose 'Party Doll' hit had first inspired Holly to seek out the producer. Rockabilly was little-known for the imaginative use of instrumental effects but Knox's sides often featured keyboards, rarely heard in that kind of music.

Between 1956 and February 1959 Knox had as many Hot Hundred hits as Holly; he was one of the leading stars on the rock'n'roll package tours of 1957 and his group the Rhythm Orchids achieved coast-to-coast fame through TV appearances. Yet in comparison to Holly, Knox is unknown today. The reason for this neglect lies, perhaps, in the failure of Tex-Mex to gel into a major style. Knox's records were pleasant and attractive, but hardly powerful enough to fit into the rock mainstream. Power is not a word which one associates with Buddy Holly, either, but this other Texan had gifts which lifted his music above particular stylistic considerations.

Holly's songs had the impact they did because they were intimate dialogues between friends, the gossip of the school yard or coffee bar, of boys and their fears and hopes, dates and dreams. These small-town conversations, delivered with a nervous, nursery-rhyme-type phrasing, even ran to the introduction of a character who appeared in more than one song: the famous 'Peggy Sue', whose marriage was chronicled in a later Holly hit. Such continuing strands encouraged an empathy between singer and listener which was unequalled during Holly's lifetime and much imitated afterwards.

Many of Buddy Holly's compositions have been performed in a variety of styles from the Sixties to the present by other artists. 'That'll Be The Day' even inspired a film of the same name – a far cry from *The Searchers*, the movie from which Holly stole John Wayne's catch-phrase as the song's title (this was but one example of the singer's magpie ingenuity). Apart from the homage in these cover versions, other – more oblique – references have been made to the music and image of the Texan troubadour, notably by Elvis Costello. The trademark spectacles have been borrowed outright, as was Costello's knock-kneed stance on the cover of his first album.



The influence of Buddy Holly does not lie merely in the music, however. The deaths of Holly, Valens and the Big Bopper introduced a new aspect into rock's view of itself: the tragedy of the star cut off in his prime became a central legend.

Premature deaths have frequently been exploited by the industry in the release of substandard recordings, doctored to make them acceptable: but the reason for the success of these posthumous releases lies in the importance of the myth; they are not mere exploitation but answer a need, feeding a public fascination with the dead musician.

Holly, the man who made such bright music, was the first genuine rock star to go to an early grave, and his death revealed dark undertones in the world of the new music.

MICHAEL HEATLEY

Above: The album sleeve of Party Doll, *a compilation of Buddy Knox's hits. Below: Joint honeymoon in Acapulco for Buddy Holly with wife Maria Elena and Crickets drummer Jerry Allison with his wife Peggy Sue – she was the girl who provided the inspiration for the song.*

THE BUD

World fame, untimely death and the birth of a legend

BUDDY HOLLY is one of the central figures of rock. His importance does not lie in his death, nor in his status as preserved, mythic hero (though as a symbol he has had influence enough); rather it lies in his musical heritage. Had he lived, he might never have achieved much more, but in his short career he managed to give the music new vistas – to find a new perspective, away from the narrowing paths of rock'n'roll and rockabilly. The giants of these earliest forms of rock music had brought together disparate musical styles (taken from black rhythm and blues, doo-wop and gospel, and from white country music) and created the new excitement typical of mid-Fifties rock. But they were dinosaurs: Jerry Lee Lewis, Little Richard, Fats Domino, even Elvis himself made little real musical progress once their style had been established. Indeed, many tended to *regress* – Jerry Lee, Carl Perkins and any number of rockabillies reverted to safe country pastures – while the rhythm and blues-based rockers failed to move on from the vigorous forms they played so well.

Holly, on the other hand, showed that musical progress was more than possible. His singles display a variety of approach which no-one had matched before; shaking the elements of rock melody and rhythm into varied patterns, far from the rigid formulas of the classic rockers, but also far removed from the self-conscious, slick popularisation of the manufactured teen idols such as Pat Boone or Fabian. Holly did not change the basic musical elements of rock; in his hands they stayed as simple and as affecting as they had ever been. But he showed how these simple building blocks could be continually rearranged to provide new listening experiences, and provided the foundations on which the successful groups of the Sixties were to elaborate.

Early Holly days

Born in Lubbock, Texas, on 7 September 1936, Charles Hardin Holley was the youngest of four children of a poor but happy family. His real Christian names were rarely used – his mother having decided that Buddy suited him better – and whoever drew up his first recording contract dropped the 'e' from the surname,

probably accidentally. The singer retained this spelling for professional use.

The early musical influences on Holly are uncertain, although there is some evidence from early family recordings that he and his brothers Larry and Travis were inspired by Hank Williams and Jimmie Rodgers and the more traditional country styles of Bill Monroe and the Louvin Brothers. Buddy received some formal musical education, but it seems that his guitar style evolved from his general musical environment – specifically from what his brothers and sister showed him on the instrument. From early beginnings, singing country songs like 'Lovesick Blues' on the school bus, Holly graduated to playing school concerts and dances, often with friends who would later accompany him on his records.

His musical talent soon blossomed: by the time he was 15 he could play most well-known country songs by ear. Within a short time he had made the decision to become an entertainer and he started to look for ways to achieve his aim. Early demo recordings made at this time show a style between country and rockabilly; indeed, Holly and a school friend, Bob Montgomery, were appearing locally, billed as 'Buddy and Bob – Western and Bop'. The purpose of these demos was to persuade a label to sign the duo but no-one expressed interest, although Holly and Montgomery soon had their own radio show on KDAV and played regular concerts in Lubbock.

Buddy Holly and the Crickets in 1957: Jerry Allison on drums, Holly with Fender Stratocaster guitar and Joe B. Mauldin playing string bass.

Supporting the stars

The organiser of this early musical activity was their first manager, 'Hi-pockets' Duncan. He booked both local and national artists into the Lubbock area, and was a DJ on radio KDAV. Buddy and Bob often appeared as a supporting act for out-of-town names, and it was during a show headlined by Bill Haley and the Comets that Buddy came to the attention of a Nashville booking agent, Eddie Crandall. He subsequently played some of Buddy and Bob's demos to publisher Jim Denny, who placed Holly with Decca Records in Nashville. Buddy had expected any record deal to include Montgomery, but Decca were looking for solo singers and, after some selfless persuasion from Bob, he accepted the offer.

In January 1956, Holly made the first of three trips to Nashville to record. But his enthusiasm and pride at being signed to Decca soon waned. His first release, 'Blue Days, Black Nights', failed to make the charts, and it became apparent that his musical intentions were at odds with Decca's A&R decisions. Although a few of his Nashville recordings such as 'Midnight Shift' and 'Rock Around With Ollie Vee' were innovative and can be regarded as among his best, they were passed over for release in favour of standard and uninspiring renditions of ballads such as 'Modern Don Juan' and 'You Are My One Desire'. Decca's lack of appreciation for Holly's talents can best be summed up by one quote from Paul Cohen, then a Decca executive: 'Buddy Holly is the biggest no-talent I ever worked with.'

Nashville to New Mexico

Buddy had used local musicians for some of the Decca recordings, among them Sonny Curtis, Don Guess and Jerry Allison. Allison in particular was important to Holly's developing style – the pair had begun to play dances with Buddy singing and playing guitar accompanied only by Allison's drums, and their efforts to produce a full sound with limited instrumentation became the nucleus of the Crickets' later style. On other Nashville cuts Holly was accompanied by such luminaries as session saxist 'Boots' Randolph and guitarist Grady Martin, but it is evident from the results that he was more at home with his own musicians.

Holly may have had this fact in mind when he travelled to Norman Petty's studio in Clovis, New Mexico, for the first time in 1956. Together with Jerry Allison he made some demos, including 'Brown Eyed Handsome Man' and 'Bo Diddley', and sent a number of these to Decca in a last attempt to get them to give him more freedom in recording. But the company were not so inclined and, after a year of his contract had elapsed, Holly found himself dropped from the label. Holly decided to return to Petty's studio, which he had found particularly relaxing to record in, since the low rates allowed some time for experimentation. Together with Allison, rhythm guitarist Niki Sullivan and Larry Welborn on bass (later replaced by Joe Mauldin), Holly began rehearsing songs to be recorded in Clovis and sent to Roulette Records in New York via a member of Buddy Knox's Rhythm Orchids, who had already recorded at Petty's studios and been signed by the label.

Among the songs was 'That'll Be The Day', previously rejected by Decca, which the group recorded in January 1957, together with 'I'm Looking For Someone To Love'. These were offered to and rejected by Roulette, probably because they

DY HOLLY STORY

sounded very similar to Knox's record, 'Party Doll', which was having great success. Norman Petty, who had contacts in New York, offered to try to get the group a deal and, after another rejection from Columbia, Bob Thiele of the recently revived Brunswick label purchased the demos for release just as they were.

Since the Brunswick concern was a subsidiary of Decca – who still had an unreleased version of 'That'll Be The Day' and a clause in their contract forbidding Holly to re-record the song – Petty and Holly suggested the record be released under the group name of the Crickets in order to disguise Holly's involvement. Some three months later the record was released and, despite some early plays, looked set for obscurity. But after two further months, 'That'll Be The Day' began to pick up heavy airplay and sales, finally entering the US Hot Hundred and peaking at Number 3 in late September 1957.

Meanwhile Holly and the Crickets had recorded enough material for several future singles, and 'Words Of Love' had been released as a single under Holly's name. However, it was not until 'Peggy Sue' was issued some weeks later that Buddy's name really came to the fore. Again the record sold slowly at first, but by the end of 1957 had reached the Top Ten on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Crickets' follow-up, 'Oh Boy', charted while their first single was still listed as a best-seller, thus giving Holly and his group a spectacular introduction to the heady world of stardom. They were booked onto TV shows and package tours; the latter were breathtaking by today's standards, offering fans a glimpse of 10 or 12 top-line rock'n'roll acts for a mere couple of dollars admission.

Crickets abroad

During the year that followed both Holly and the Crickets appeared almost continuously in the charts, with titles like 'Rave On', 'Maybe Baby', 'Early In The Morning' and 'Think It Over', while touring extensively. In 1958 they visited both Australia and Britain, leaving behind hordes of converts, both to their musical style and to Holly's appearance – for not only did he sport horn-rimmed glasses (at the time something totally different for a rock'n'roll star), but the guitar he played, the recently-introduced Fender Stratocaster, caused a sensation. Such was the impression his appearance made that years later others were aping the 'Holly' look; Hank Marvin of the Shadows in the

The Buddy Holly Story (from top to bottom): Bob Montgomery (right) sees Holly and Allison off for the second Nashville session in July 1956; Crickets in T-shirts – Holly fronts Allison, Mauldin and Niki Sullivan; Holly at Radio KDAV with Larry Welborn (centre) and Bob Montgomery; the Crickets at the Ambassador Hotel, New York; and Holly at the microphone.

Sixties, Elton John in the Seventies and Elvis Costello in the Eighties have continued this tradition to varying degree.

Buddy Holly's professional career lasted a mere 18 months, during which time he ended his association with both Norman Petty and the Crickets. The split with the Crickets was made inevitable by Holly's decision in October 1958 to move to New York. Jerry Allison's marriage to a local Texan girl made him unwilling to move to the East Coast, while he and Mauldin were persuaded by Petty that the Crickets (who at that time had nominally registered more hits than Holly) were still a going concern and could continue the hits without their lead singer.

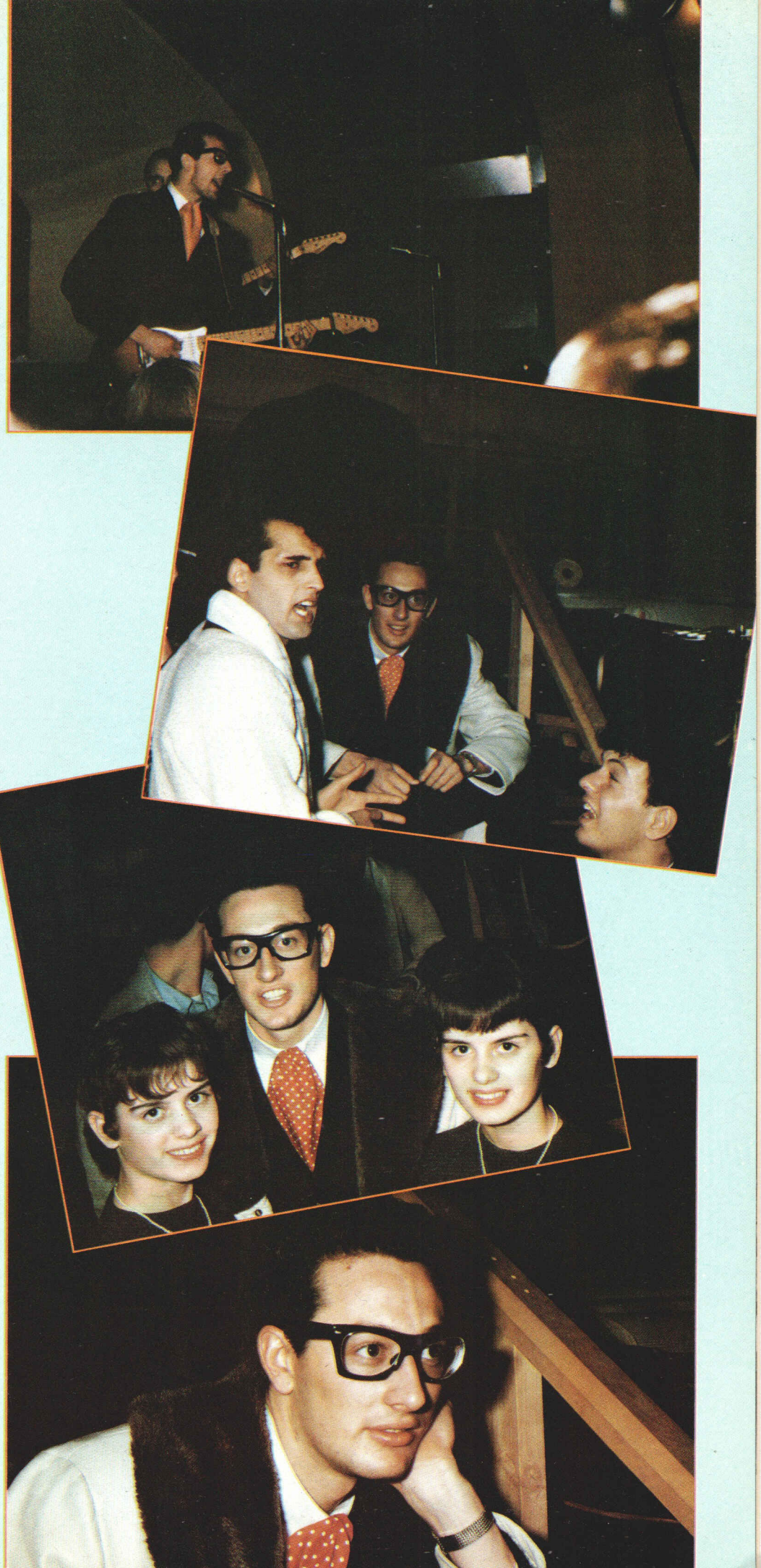
Wedlock and worries

These events placed great strain on Holly. He was reportedly upset at splitting with the Crickets and infuriated at the circumstances that followed the termination of his association with Norman Petty. Holly's dissatisfaction reputedly stemmed from Petty's reluctance to seek publicity for the group in US teen magazines. Also, it was claimed that Petty had skimped on publicity by taking the group's photographs himself rather than employing a professional photographer.

Holly's ability to deal with these and other problems was, in 1958, helped by his association with Maria Elena Santiago, a Puerto Rican girl he had met and almost immediately fallen in love with at the offices of his New York publishers, Southern Music.

Although the specific grievances might appear trivial, it is apparent that Maria Elena had encouraged Holly to assert his own preferences, and successful recordings with Dick Jacobs in New York – sessions which yielded 'Raining In My Heart' and 'It Doesn't Matter Anymore' – had suggested that Holly could survive in the studio without his erstwhile mentor. In the months that followed his marriage in August 1958 Holly became more serious (a mood reflected in the last songs he wrote late in the year) and more concerned with 'taking care of business'.

It is certain that fate changed Buddy in the same way as, ultimately, it changes everyone catapulted from obscurity to stardom; just how much it changed him only the few who were close to him could tell. From the start Holly was determined to make it, and there are those who suggest that he was ruthlessly single-minded in his struggle to leave his past behind and make it to the top.



Buddy Holly on the fateful Winter Party Tour (from top): playing on stage; chatting with Frankie Sardo (left) and with Dion, two other major attractions of the rock package; with the Jayettes, a vocal duo who supported local groups in the Wisconsin area; and watching backstage. Holly was now a major star, with an international following, but had been forced to tour by financial pressure.

In the days before in-depth interviews it was hard to form a real impression, but for many Buddy Holly summed up through his music and appearance the hopes of the kid with acne and girl problems . . . he sang about the pains of adolescence, rather than about adult experiences. If Holly failed with many hard-line rock 'n'roll fans because he didn't assure his audience that his latest chick was 'Nothin' but a hound dog', then he made the point for those who were up against reality by echoing the words they had mumbled to their dates: 'Well I love you girl and I want you' ('Peggy Sue'); or thought to themselves, 'Everyone says go ahead and ask her' ('Everyday'), or cried out their despair, 'A date at seven, I dreamed of heaven, now it's way past eight' ('An Empty Cup'). This might have sounded false given the Frankie Avalon treatment, but Holly's own conviction came through and was combined with fine instrumental backing from the Crickets to make some of the most memorable rock'n'roll music of the era.

The Winter Tour

Despite his recording successes, Holly's future was by no means assured in 1958: his latest record, 'Heartbeat', was struggling to make an impact on the charts and he was penniless, a result of the split with Petty, since all monies due to him were being held up pending settlement. In these circumstances Buddy was forced to go out on the road and, against his better judgement, agreed to undertake a tour of the Midwest at a time when he knew the travelling would be, at best, miserable due to the extreme cold.

Half-way through the 'Winter Dance Party' tour, exasperated by the lack of comforts on the tour bus and a shortage of time to get his clothes cleaned, Holly decided to charter a plane to fly to the next city in order to get some laundry done and catch up on some sleep. Two other headliners on the tour, the Big Bopper and Ritchie Valens, agreed to share the cost and fly with him. Soon after take-off (just before 1 am on 3 February 1959), the plane was in difficulty and crashed to the ground, killing the occupants instantly.

Since the accident, controversy has raged as to whether Buddy Holly had reached his peak, or whether he could have achieved much more had he lived. Whatever the answer, it is undeniable that Holly's importance following his death has been increasingly felt, particularly in the UK and, latterly in his homeland.

Like Eddie Cochran and others who died in their prime, some of Holly's continuing appeal lies in the time-capsule effect of his removal from the recording scene; both his image and recorded legacy have remained forever young, for where other rockers have become mere shadows of their former selves, Buddy Holly will always be 22 years old and still rocking.

The Crickets continue

There can be few artists who do not owe some debt to Buddy Holly. Some have acknowledged that debt in words and music, style or imitation. Still more have unconsciously felt Holly's influence in their own music, and the formation of many groups throughout the Sixties and Seventies followed the pattern Holly and the Crickets set in the Fifties. Among those who have felt Buddy Holly's influence more than most are his former friends and sidemen, the Crickets themselves.

Despite a short professional career with Holly and considerable success in the Sixties with a string of hits of their own and extensive tours in England, the group have found it hard to maintain their own identity, feeling themselves obliged to feature Holly's material both on stage and on record. In recent years the Crickets (Jerry Allison, Sonny Curtis and Joe B. Mauldin) have toured regularly in the States with Waylon Jennings, himself a protégé of Holly, for the most part featuring Holly songs in their act.

Doubtless the Crickets are grateful for the heritage that has kept them together over three decades, but it is unfortunate that some excellent recordings by the group have failed to register, partly due to a lack of readiness by their fans to accept the Crickets doing anything other than Buddy Holly songs.

The last few years have seen continuing interest from other artists in recording Holly songs in a variety of styles. With artists as diverse as Mickey Gilley, Blondie, the Beach Boys, Tanya Tucker and Santana recording his songs it seems certain that Buddy Holly's influence will continue to be felt in popular music for some time yet.

JOHN BEECHER

Left: Buddy Holly on his wedding day with his Puerto Rican wife Maria Elena Santiago. Below: The Riverside Studios, venue for Holly's penultimate gig on 1 February 1959. Opposite: Buddy Holly and the Crickets on stage. The two inset pictures show the Crickets in 1957 and again some 22 years later in 1979 when they were supporting country star Waylon Jennings (who was touring with Holly in 1959). The line-up for both pictures is, left to right, Jerry Allison, Joe B. Mauldin and guitarist Sonny Curtis.

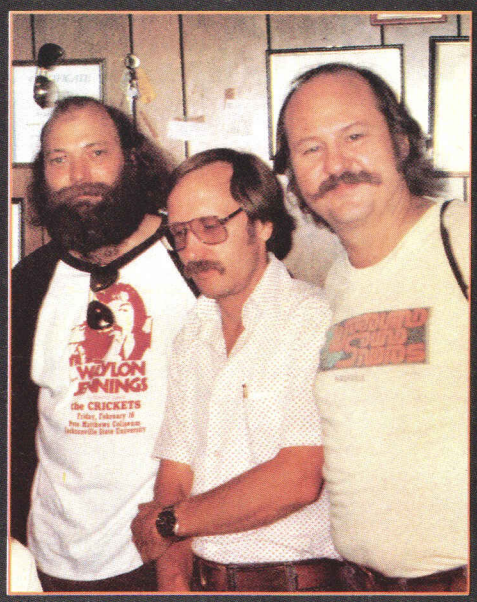
BUDDY HOLLY
Discography

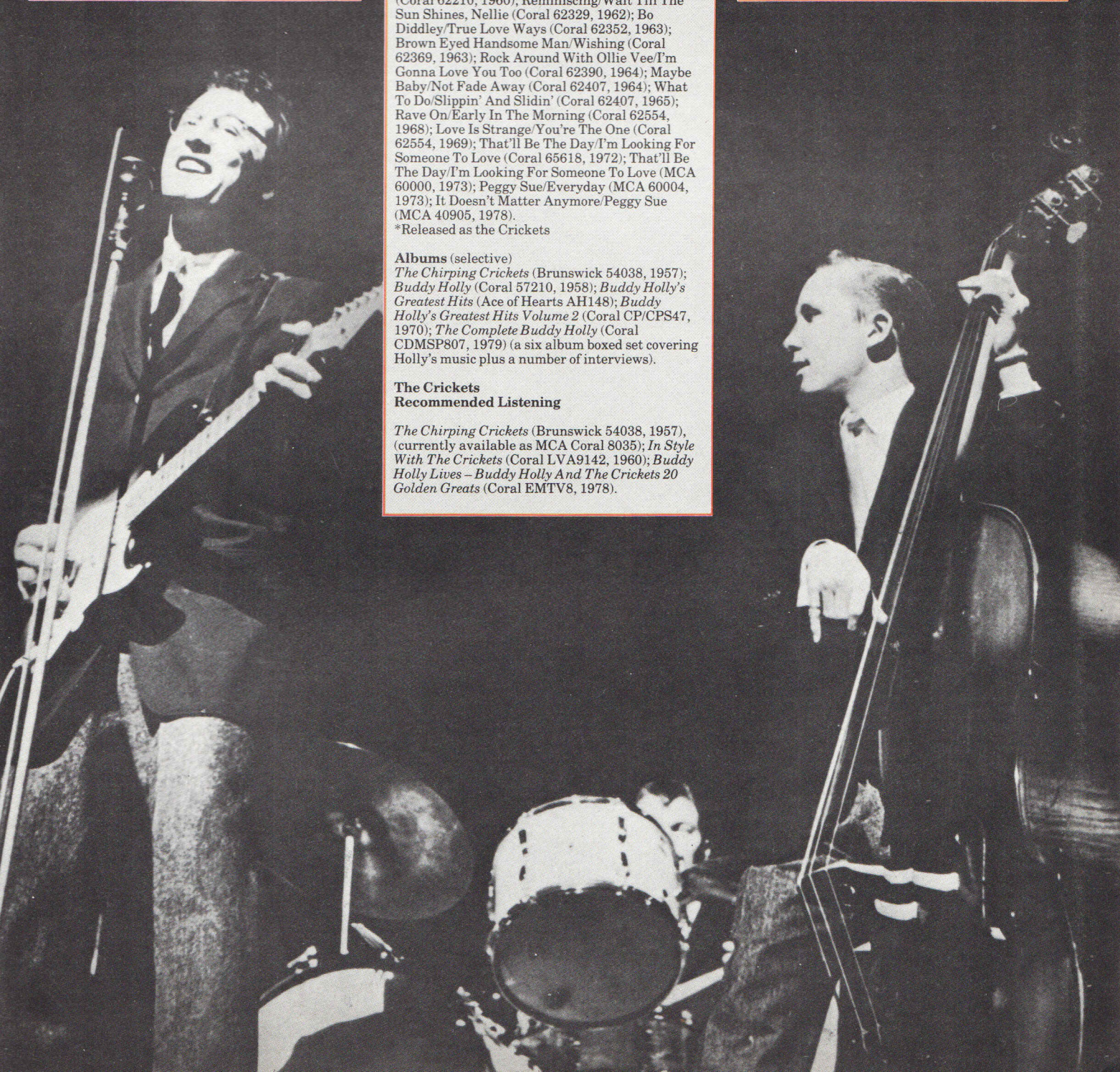
Singles
Blue Days, Black Nights/Love Me (Decca 29854, 1956); Modern Don Juan/You Are My One Desire (Decca 30166, 1956); That'll Be The Day/I'm Looking For Someone To Love* (Brunswick 55009, 1957); Words Of Love/Mailman Bring Me No More Blues (Coral 61852, 1957); Rock Around With Ollie Vee/That'll Be The Day (Decca 30434, 1957); Peggy Sue/Everyday (Coral 61885, 1957); Oh Boy/Not Fade Away* (Brunswick 55035, 1957); Love Me/You Are My One Desire (Decca 30543, 1958); I'm Gonna Love You Too/Listen To Me (Coral 61947, 1958); Maybe Baby/Tell Me How* (Brunswick 55053, 1958); Rave On/Take Your Time (Coral 61985, 1958); Think It Over/Fool's Paradise* (Brunswick 55072, 1958); Girl On My Mind/Ting-A-Ling (Decca 30650, 1958); Early In The Morning/Now We're One (Coral 62006, 1958); Its So Easy/Lonesome Tears* (Brunswick 55094, 1958); Heartbeat/Well All Right (Coral 62051, 1958); It Doesn't Matter Anymore/Raining In My Heart (Coral 62074, 1959); Peggy Sue Got Married/Crying, Waiting, Hoping (Coral 62134, 1959); True Love Ways/That Makes It Tough (Coral 62210, 1960); Reminiscing/Wait Till The Sun Shines, Nellie (Coral 62329, 1962); Bo Diddley/True Love Ways (Coral 62352, 1963); Brown Eyed Handsome Man/Wishing (Coral 62369, 1963); Rock Around With Ollie Vee/I'm Gonna Love You Too (Coral 62390, 1964); Maybe Baby/Not Fade Away (Coral 62407, 1964); What To Do/Slippin' And Slidin' (Coral 62407, 1965); Rave On/Early In The Morning (Coral 62554, 1968); Love Is Strange/You're The One (Coral 62554, 1969); That'll Be The Day/I'm Looking For Someone To Love (Coral 65618, 1972); That'll Be The Day/I'm Looking For Someone To Love (MCA 60000, 1973); Peggy Sue/Everyday (MCA 60004, 1973); It Doesn't Matter Anymore/Peggy Sue (MCA 40905, 1978).
*Released as the Crickets

Albums (selective)
The Chirping Crickets (Brunswick 54038, 1957); *Buddy Holly* (Coral 57210, 1958); *Buddy Holly's Greatest Hits* (Ace of Hearts AH148); *Buddy Holly's Greatest Hits Volume 2* (Coral CP/CPS47, 1970); *The Complete Buddy Holly* (Coral CDMSP807, 1979) (a six album boxed set covering Holly's music plus a number of interviews).

The Crickets
Recommended Listening

The Chirping Crickets (Brunswick 54038, 1957), (currently available as MCA Coral 8035); *In Style With The Crickets* (Coral LVA9142, 1960); *Buddy Holly Lives – Buddy Holly And The Crickets 20 Golden Greats* (Coral EMTV8, 1978).





NEW MEXICO MUSIC

Norman Petty's studio gave rock a new direction

DESPITE SEVERAL SUCCESSES with other artists and with his own compositions, Norman Petty's name is most frequently remembered for his association with Buddy Holly and the Crickets, a partnership that produced some of the best rock'n'roll of the Fifties, although in the end it resulted in bitterness and recrimination.

Born in Clovis, New Mexico, in 1927, Petty received little formal musical education but took up the piano early, and by the age of 13 he could play by ear well enough to command a regular request spot on the local radio station. This led to a job with the station as an announcer and later as a full-time disc jockey, a position he held until 1948, when he married and moved to Dallas, Texas. He had always been interested in sound engineering and gained valuable experience as a part-time engineer at Jim Beck's studio, at that time the major recording location in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. During this time he formed the Norman Petty Trio, a group which was hardly adventurous musically but which was soon in demand at country club dances, playing melodic, easy-listening music.

Family foundations

By 1954 the Trio, comprising Petty on the organ, his wife Vi on piano and a guitarist, Jack Vaughn, had saved enough money to establish a recording studio alongside the Petty home in Clovis. It was there they made their first commercial recording, 'Mood Indigo', which was initially released on their own NorVaJak label. The record began to get considerable local radio play and was subsequently leased to RCA Records in New York, with which company it became a national hit. This resulted in the Trio being brought to New York to record, but Petty soon decided that he would rather work in his own studio where there was less pressure; the Trio continued to record there for the next few years while Petty improved the studio facilities with the proceeds from their records.

Rhythm Orchids rock

Soon other local musicians began to use the studio, but it was not until Buddy Knox and Jimmy Bowen visited Clovis in 1956 that Petty began to think of his studio as anything other than a convenient place for the Trio to record. Known locally as the Rhythm Orchids, Knox and Bowen hired Petty's studio to cut two sides, 'Party Doll' and 'I'm Stickin' With You', which they had pressed on their own label. Later sold to Roulette Records, both sides became million-sellers in their own

Left: The Norman Petty Trio – Petty, wife Vi and Jack Vaughn. Below: Petty presents Holly with a gold record for 'Peggy Sue' with Brunswick producer Bob Thiele (centre).

right. However, it was following Buddy Holly's initial hits, both as a solo artist and as a member of the Crickets, that Petty began to be regarded as a pioneering independent producer.

Holly had already recorded for Decca in Nashville by the time he came to Clovis, but many of his early recordings had lacked polish and some were poorly and unsympathetically recorded. Petty changed all this by allowing the group more time to record and generally encouraging and assisting them to make records that were right for them, both technically and musically. His patience was rewarded by the regular appearance of both Holly and the Crickets in the charts. By then Petty had begun to act as personal manager to the group and soon others were clamouring to record in Clovis in the hope that Petty could help them to stardom.

Credits and controversy

Although Norman Petty appeared to others to have masterminded Holly's success, his real strength was as a recording engineer and producer. The appearance of his name as co-writer on many of Holly's songs for example, is misleading; it is doubtful if he really contributed as much as his composing credits would suggest, particularly since his claim to have written lyrics to many songs is refuted by others who wrote with Holly. It may be significant that Petty's only other successful compositions have been instrumentals.

In 1958 Buddy Holly announced that he was going to New York and severed his connections with the producer. Petty probably thought Holly would ultimately tire of the New York scene and return to Clovis, particularly since the Crickets had decided to split with Holly and remain in Texas. But although Holly's death in 1959 prevented any such reunion, Petty ultimately obtained control of all Holly's unreleased material and between 1962 and 1969 supervised the preparation of these tapes for commercial release. Much criticism has been made of Petty's overdubbing of these tapes, which in many cases obscured Holly's own ideas, but it is undeniable that he often succeeded in making commercial records from primitive demonstration tapes; some of the resulting singles were huge hits in the UK.

Petty continued to record the Crickets without Holly, but by mid 1959 they too had left Clovis and moved to New York. Later, Petty began an association with Jimmy Gilmer and the Fireballs, a group who had come to Clovis to record in the wake of Holly's success. After several moderate hits with instrumentals, Gilmer and the Fireballs hit big with a vocal track entitled 'Sugar Shack', while another instrumental group coached by Petty, the String-a-Longs, provided him with his biggest hit, the oft-covered 'Wheels'. Both groups failed to consolidate their popularity, however, despite recording some good material in the Sixties.

Above left: Petty visited London with his wife in 1976 to sell the rights to Buddy Holly's songs to ex-Beatle Paul McCartney. Above: The original studio in Clovis, New Mexico, where Holly and Buddy Knox made their first hits. Left: A photograph of Petty with the author, taken in 1964.

Norman Petty's sale of the publishing rights to Buddy Holly's song catalogue to ex-Beatle Paul McCartney in the early Seventies appeared to many to be a decision which belied his reputation as a shrewd businessman. Whatever the details of the deal – and few have been divulged – McCartney has kept the songs in the public eye, most notably in the form of an annual 'Buddy Holly Week'. Petty, certainly, ascribes McCartney's interest to a genuine enthusiasm rather than commercial gain – and the young Beatle's early compositions with John Lennon exhibited his undisguised admiration for the Texas songwriter.

Norman Petty continues to operate his studio in Clovis, continually updating his equipment and recording new talent. He has so far failed to find anyone to equal Buddy Holly, but if the recordings he produced with Holly and the Crickets are to be regarded as his most important contribution to popular music, then he can justly be proud.

JOHN BEECHER

THE HAPPY ROCKABILLY

Buddy Knox took his music from Texas to the charts

TEX-MEX, A PHRASE commonly used to describe the rock'n'roll of such artists as Buddy Holly and Buddy Knox, has nothing whatever to do with Mexican music. Rather it's a contraction of Texas, where Holly and Knox were born, and *New* Mexico, where both recorded their million-selling chart-toppers in 1957. The similarities between the two artists are strong and, although Holly's influence has been the more important, Knox enjoyed as many hits during Holly's lifetime.

Holly, from Lubbock, Texas, heard the blues by tuning into Shreveport's R&B radio stations; Knox, on the other hand, was raised 80 miles to the north of Lubbock on the prairies of the upper 'Panhandle' and was comparatively isolated. He heard the hits of Nappy Brown, the Midnighters and Ruth Brown over Radio KRRD from Dallas in the early Fifties; prior to this, however, black music had not entered his world. Bob Wills was probably the most popular musician around but Knox, who tuned his second-hand guitar to open G and played a harmonica on a rack around his neck, related more to the sounds of Hank Williams and Eddy Arnold. His music became an extension of white hillbilly rather than black R&B.

Backbeat with brushes

Wayne 'Buddy' Knox, the elder child of Lester and Gladys Knox, grew up on a wheat farm in Happy, Texas, where he was born on 20 July 1933. Twenty-two by the time he cut a record, he had taken degrees in accountancy and business administration and thought of joining an oil company before a career in music intervened. Knox had been at West Texas State College in Dumas several years before meeting fellow students Jimmy Bowen and Don Lanier. The trio formed the Rhythm Orchids in 1955 and played school dances and small nightclubs around Dumas and Amarillo. Nothing much happened until a young drummer, Don Mills, asked to sit in with a pair of brushes. Mills played a heavy backbeat on a cardboard box; the floor was suddenly full of dancing feet and the Rhythm Orchids swopped the lonesome sound of Eddy Arnold for the brighter bounce of rockabilly. Without Mills, who went back to school, the group travelled 140 miles across the state line to Clovis, New Mexico, where Norman Petty operated the area's only *bona fide* recording studio.

Using Dave Alldred, a drummer who worked with Petty's own trio, they cut two tunes: 'Party Doll', a song Knox had written in 1948, and 'I'm Stickin' With You', a Knox-Bowen number which Bowen sang himself. Back in Dumas they gave the tapes to a local businessman who pressed 500 copies of both songs on his own label, Blue Moon. When these ran out, the Rhythm Orchids formed Triple D (named after Dumas' only radio station, KDDD) and pressed up another 2500 discs to give away at local gigs. Lanier's sister, a model in New York, sent a copy to music publisher Phil Kahl. He and his partner, Morris Levy, bought the master and formed a brand new independent label, Roulette, to market both songs on a national basis. For the national launch, 'I'm Stickin' With You' was backed with 'Everlovin'' by Bowen, and 'Party Doll' was coupled with 'My Baby's Gone', again by Bowen. Both were released simultaneously and both entered the Hot Hundred on 13 February 1957. 'Party Doll' was in the best-sellers for 23 weeks, narrowly missing the top rung, while 'I'm Stickin' With You' also reached the Top Twenty. Both sold a million copies.

The many faces of Buddy Knox. Left: An early publicity shot. Opposite: Warming up for a late-Seventies concert; in London's Nashville Rooms in 1970 (inset left) and the Ed Sullivan Show with the Rhythm Orchids in 1957 (inset right, Knox second right).

The Orchids bloom

In the hands of the Rhythm Orchids, Tex-Mex borrowed little from black sources, and their early records seem hardly influenced by rhythm and blues. 'Rock Your Little Baby To Sleep' (credited to Lieutenant Knox – Buddy was serving six months in the Tank Corps when the record was released) and 'Hula Love' (which owed more to American-Indian rhythms than Hawaii) are pleasantly melodic with instrumental lines of great charm. Both records made the Top Thirty in 1957, when Knox also starred in Alan Freed's rock'n'roll package tours and appeared in Warner Brothers' shoddy movie, *Jamboree*.

Unlike many of his frantic contemporaries, Knox had a clean and distinctive style; his singing was easy and natural – more so than Holly, whose deliberately mannered vocals often seemed forced. The band was good too. The beat, jaunty rather than powerful, was complemented by lead guitarist Lanier, who played memorable solos with a crisp metallic

sound. An average drummer, Alldred sometimes showed flair; he worked out the tom-tom beat on 'Hula Love' by alternating between a snare and an old Salvation Army drum with a coat thrown across it. Bowen, from Santa Rita, New Mexico, was not a virtuoso musician; he got by on stage, but rarely played bass in the studio, where his place would be taken by New York sessionmen or, in Clovis, by Joe B. Mauldin of the Crickets. Knox played rhythm guitar, occasionally leaving the post to Buddy Holly who strummed along on 'All For You'. Members of the Crickets appear on other tracks, including Jerry Allison, whose drumming propels 'Swingin' Daddy' and 'I Think I'm Gonna Kill Myself'.

The Roulette hits

Knox cut 25 titles for the Roulette label and his consistency was quite remarkable. The barely-rehearsed spontaneity of his first album is the stuff of which the finest rockabilly is made, and even such much-revived tracks as 'Rockhouse', 'Maybellene' and 'Rock Around The Clock' amount to more than mere album fillers. Later, he offered a more produced, more developed sound augmented by extra session guitarists and pianists like Bobby Darin. It was still interesting listening: 'All For You', with jangling piano solo courtesy of Petty's wife, Vi, 'The Girl With The Golden Hair' (one of Knox's finest achievements) and 'Storm Clouds', with its innovatory shuffling organ, were as captivating as the hits. These continued apace: 'Swingin' Daddy', 'Somebody Touched Me' (Number 22 in 1958) and 'That's Why I Cry'. 'I Think I'm Gonna Kill Myself' was banned in several states but nevertheless made the Hot Hundred in 1959. It was the last of Knox's eight hits for Roulette.

Each of the Rhythm Orchids made solo records; Jimmy Bowen enjoyed four solo hits before retiring to take over the Chancellor label's West Coast operations and subsequently headed the A&R department of Reprise Records. Dave Alldred became Dickey Doo of Dickey Doo and the Don'ts whose 'Click Clack' was a US Top Thirty hit in 1958. Donnie Lanier cut less successful singles for the Roulette, Dot, Gee and Reprise labels. Knox himself signed with Liberty in 1960, where he produced both passable pop-rock – 'Lovey Dovey' (which charted at Number 25) and 'Ling Ting Tong' (65), for example – and far tamer material. He went on to record for the Reprise, Ruff and United Artists labels where, like most ex-rockabillies, he turned towards mainstream country and western. House producer Bob Montgomery, Buddy Holly's old partner, helped Knox to reach the C&W charts with 'Gypsy Man' in 1968.

During the Seventies Knox made his home in Canada. He also toured Britain, where his happy, unassuming personality contrasted strikingly with the hard-edged rockabilly renaissance – although his light, skipping Tex-Mex music remained as infectious as ever.

BILL MILLAR

BUDDY KNOX
Recommended Listening

Party Doll (Pye NSPL28243) (Includes: Party Doll, Rockhouse, Maybellene, Mary Lou, Rock Your Little Baby To Sleep, Hula Love, Devil Woman, Rockabilly Walk, Rock Around The Clock, I'm In Love With You, Swingin' Daddy, C'mon Baby, Somebody Touched Me, That's Why I Cry, I Think I'm Gonna Kill Myself, Whenever I'm Lonely, All For You, Long Lonely Nights, Storm Clouds, The Girl With The Golden Hair).

They died young

Rock's lifestyle has reaped a grim harvest

WHEN MICK JAGGER read out lines from Shelley's elegy to John Keats in tribute to Brian Jones at the Rolling Stones' free Hyde Park concert the day after their late guitarist's death in 1969, the choice of text was altogether appropriate. He was contributing to a myth that had its origins in the 19th-century romanticism of Keats, Shelley and their circle: an image of the artist as doomed youth.

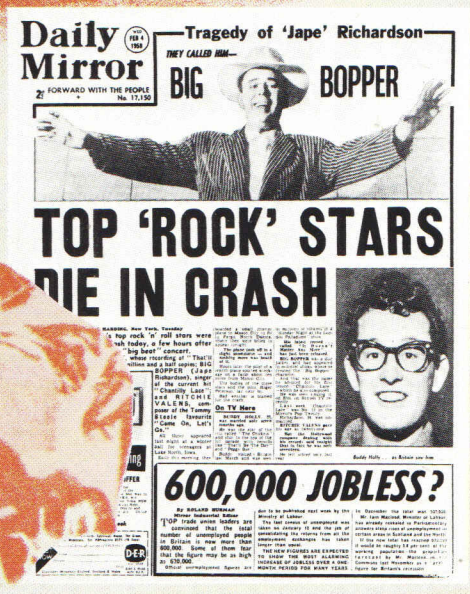
Rupert Brooke killed in the First World War, Dylan Thomas drinking himself to death in 1953, James Dean crashing his Porsche in September 1955 – the myth continued into the 20th century, and even before the great rock deaths of the Fifties and Sixties, the image of the tragic performers, dead before their time, had been handed on by the martyrs of jazz, people like Bessie Smith, Bix Beiderbecke, Charlie Christian and Charlie Parker.

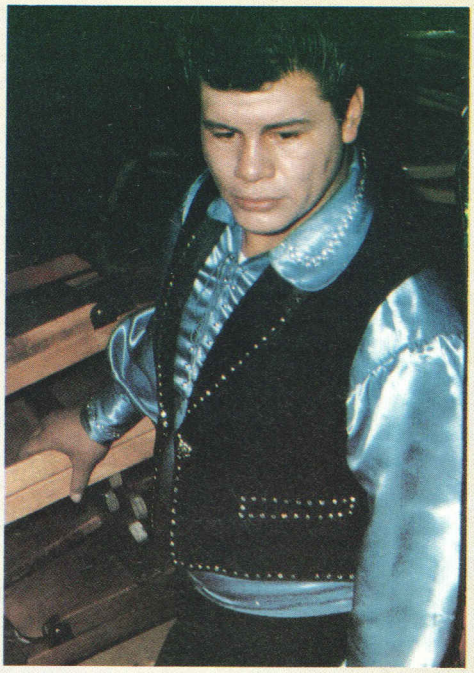
Outlaws and outsiders

The image of early death has become a part of the 'rock lifestyle', the fate of the outsider who must pay the price for outlawry in madness and execution. But although the hunting to death of the outsider is a powerful myth in rock, the facts of rock deaths are often unheroic. Rock stars die young of the same causes as any other group of the population – Stu Sutcliffe (brain haemorrhage), Jay Perkins (cancer) and Johnny Burnette (drowned fishing) were not particular victims of their lifestyle.

The most obvious common denominator of rock deaths in the Fifties was not drink, drugs, or personal violence; it was the problem of travelling vast distances in a short time – the grind of life on the road. Travel was responsible for the most famous deaths of early popular music: Big Bopper, Ritchie Valens, Patsy Cline, Cowboy Copas, Hawkshaw Hawkins, Johnny Kidd, Johnny Horton, Eddie Cochran, Jim Reeves and Buddy Holly.

Holly's death was due to his exhaustive touring schedule. He had just finished playing with Valens and the Big Bopper in a 'Winter Dance Party' engagement at the Surf Ballroom in Clear Lake, Iowa, and was taking off in a single-engined Beechcraft Bonanza at 1 am in time to make the next one-night stand in Fargo, North Dakota, while the rest of the show, including Dion and the Belmonts, went on by bus. According to the UPI agency report at the time, the only reason Holly and the other two stars went on ahead was so they could get their concert clothes cleaned.


Daily Mirror
FORWARD WITH THE PEOPLE
Tragedy of 'Jape' Richardson
THEY CALLED HIM—
BIG BOPPER
TOP 'ROCK' STARS
DIE IN CRASH
600,000 JOBLESS?



Death and immortality

The fact that rock stars sometimes have to die to live is often a cause for cynicism, and certainly the way the work of stars like Jimi Hendrix, Jim Reeves and Holly himself have continued to be released, often with updated backing tapes, shows the opportunist rock industry at its worst. But as Dave Laing points out in his biography of Holly (Studio Vista, 1971): 'The death in mid-career of a singer, a sportsman or a film actor always has a more dramatic effect than that of a writer, painter or director because they are performers, people with an immediate physical presence for their audience.

'This fact gives their records or films, and especially those released for the first time after their death, a new significance. What before had seemed to be only the first stage in a career (Valens) or the first peak (Holly), now has to be seen in a new perspective, as the whole of that career, something completed. The work of the performer has consequently to be revalued, and it attains a new scarcity value. This, rather than sentimentality, is the reason why the records of dead singers tend to be successful.'

The sacrificial victim

There is another factor, however. It is interesting that both Holly and Jim Reeves, another artist with a huge posthumous sale (though the plane-crash which killed him occurred on his way home from clinching a property deal, not in the midst of touring) found their inspiration in the work of Hank Williams. The Alabama country singer's application of blues-based guitar licks, his songwriting and general dependence on pills and booze made him a charismatic figure and precursor of rock heroes to come, both in death as in life.

Williams had become addicted to drugs after using painkillers when he was thrown from a horse at the age of 17, injuring his spine; he had been fired by the 'Grand Ole Opry' radio show for his perpetual drunkeness, and his first marriage ended in divorce for the same reason. After playing a New Year's Eve gig in Canton, Ohio on the last day of 1952, Williams died while being driven through a snowstorm to Oak Hill, Virginia where he was to play the following night. Ironically, his last release was 'I'll Never Get Out Of This World Alive'. Williams was an archetype, symbolic not merely of so many stars of this age, but of an age-old need for the sacrificial victim.

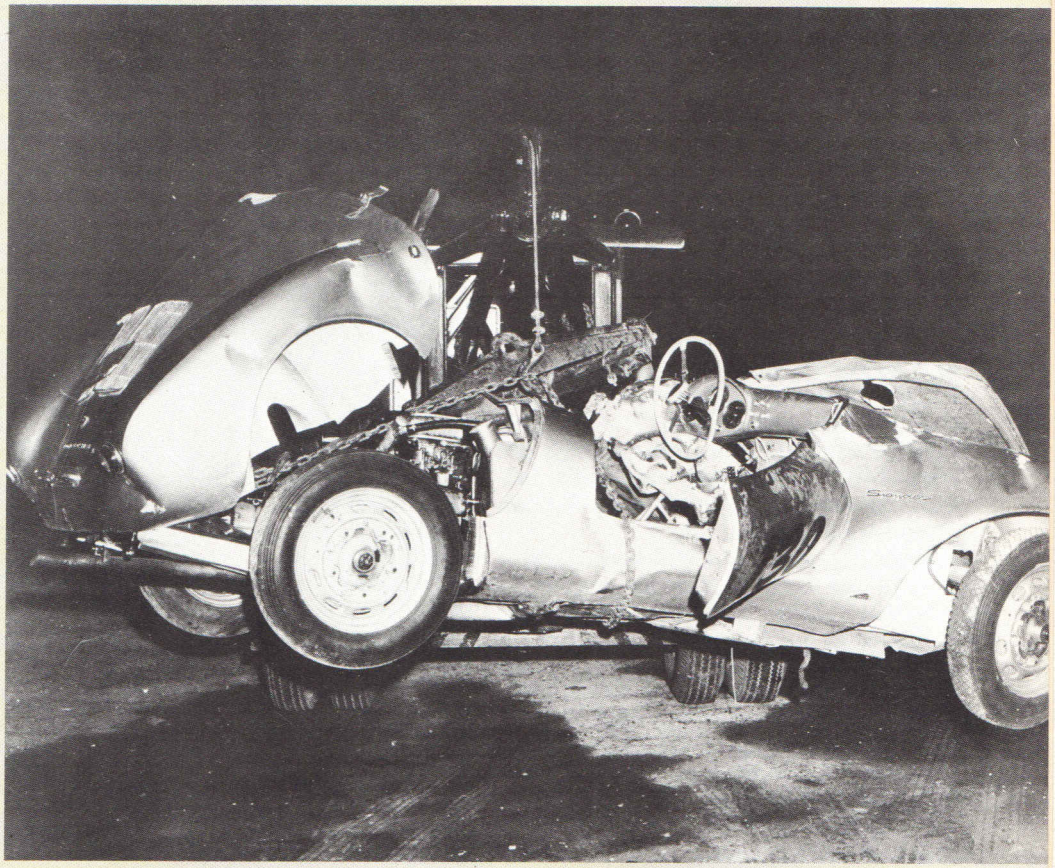
In 1965, Phil Ochs wrote of his close friend and folksinger-turned-rock-star, Bob Dylan: 'One year from now I think it will be very dangerous to Dylan's life to get on the stage . . . Dylan has become part of so many people's psyche, and there's so many screwed-up people in America, and death is such a part of the American scene now. The Kennedy assassination is a part of this story. People are much more conscious of death because when Kennedy was killed, youth was killed, beauty was killed, security was killed . . .'

Opposite: The wreckage of the Beechcraft light aeroplane in which the 'Winter Dance Party' stars perished and (opposite below) the press reaction to the tragedy: Above: Ritchie Valens (left) and the Big Bopper (right), two victims of the air crash pictured opposite. Below: The sports car in which James Dean was killed at Paso Robles, California in 1955.

Ironically, Dylan has outlived Ochs, who committed suicide in April 1976, but someone else to whom the warning might also have been addressed, John Lennon, died precisely because he came back into the limelight.

And the reason why he died goes back beyond Cochran and Big Bopper and Holly, back beyond Hank Williams and Bessie Smith, back beyond John Keats, even beyond Christianity. It is the myth that the sacrifice of the individual is vital to the success of the community– a myth that lives on today.

KARL DALLAS



Ritchie Valens

The young singer who pioneered Chicano rock

At first glance a mature, seasoned rock'n'roller, Ritchie Valens was only 17 when he died.

WHEN ROCK'N'ROLL first stopped calling itself rhythm and blues in the mid Fifties, it became a young man's game. Teenage performers like Ritchie Valens began to influence the course of popular music; his double-sided smash hit 'Donna'/'La Bamba' dominated the charts in December 1958. But, unlike rock'n'roll, Ritchie Valens did not survive to face the Sixties.

Ritchie's is not the most famous name in rock'n'roll but he had as many or even more hits than some celebrated stars. In a remarkably short career – he was not yet 18 years old when he died – Valens made some excellent individually-styled records, in which his plaintive, light vocal style contrasted with a dominant gutsy guitar sound. He was also the first in a series of 'Chicano' rock stars – singers of Mexican extraction who mixed rock'n'roll with rhythms from south of the border to produce exciting results.

Rockin' the Southwest

The Chicanos were mostly from California or the Southwest. They included Chan Romero (who recorded the original of 'Hippy Hippy Shake'), Eddie Quinteros, Freddy Fender (the leader of the Texas Chicano blues-rock scene), and later Sunny and the Sunglows ('Talk To Me'), Trini Lopez ('If I Had A Hammer') and Chris Montez ('Let's Dance'). Chicano rock was something of a catch-all term for a collection of influences that included Mexican mariachi bands, country, blues and even the swamp-pop of Louisiana and East Texas. Many whites took up the Mexican theme, notably the Champs with 'Tequila' and, later, the Sir Douglas Quintet. The Chicano records sold well in California and the Southwest, especially to the Mexican and Puerto Rican minorities, but some did well nationally and a few, notably the recordings of Ritchie Valens, became international hits.

Richard Valenzuela was born of Mexican-Indian stock in Los Angeles on 13 May 1941. Little is known about his upbringing as he never gave a really detailed interview. The photographs and film stills that survive him show a slightly chubby youngster wielding his guitar below a proud but embarrassed grin. Mexican Americans were among the lower social strata of US society and Valens' later success was in stark contrast to the fate of so many of his kind. Ritchie took an early liking to the guitar and organised a group of schoolpals into a band in 1956. Based at the Pacoima High School in Los Angeles, the band was called the Silhouettes. Their identity remains as shadowy as their name, but it is known that they played all the new R&B and rock'n'roll songs mixed with a few more traditional items. The seeds of a sound were being sown.

From schoolboy to star

By the time Valens was 16 he looked some ten years older; his heavy-jowled, thick-set features with greased-back hair belied his youth and ran contrary to the prevailing move towards 'pretty' teen stars in the Fabian/Frankie Avalon mould. Early in 1958 Ritchie's activities in playing at school hops and local gigs came to the notice of Bob Keene, one of LA's premier record men. He also owned the Keen label, for which Sam Cooke recorded, and later ran the Mustang company. Before he came across Valens, Keene had worked as a producer and talent scout for Specialty and other Californian record labels.

It was, then, an experienced and successful hitmaker who saw in the very young Ritchie Valens the two things that made a star: talent, and a marketable quality – in Ritchie's case, ethnic youth. Keene took Ritchie into a recording studio in March 1958. Soon, 'Come On Let's Go' appeared on Keene's Del-Fi label. It was a good latin rocker, very reminiscent of Bobby Freeman's then-recent hit, 'Do You Wanna Dance'. In September 1958 it entered the *Billboard* chart and in October it peaked at Number 42. A cover version by Tommy Steele sold well in the UK.

Two sides of Ritchie

With the next single came the ultimate achievement of the Valens style. Issued in November 1958, it coupled 'Donna', an intense but catchy teen ballad, with 'La Bamba', a latin rocker with a heavy bass guitar line. Both sides set a pattern for the several hastily-arranged recording sessions that followed. 'Donna' hit the Top Ten in December 1958 and soon reached Number 2 in the chart. A self-penned number, it was dedicated to Valens' high-school sweetheart, Donna Ludwig.

This success sparked off a wave of cover

versions, but also got Valens booked onto the Perry Como TV show with its national audience, and took him off on a tour of Hawaii. There was also a short appearance in the movie, *Go Johnny Go*, where Valens sang 'Ooh My Head' in the company of Alan Freed, Chuck Berry and a multitude of up-and-coming popsters. By January 1959, 'La Bamba' had taken over from 'Donna', reaching Number 22.

The Valens name was now hot enough for Keene to contemplate issuing an album, and Ritchie was booked on a tour of the Midwest to promote it. Starring Buddy Holly as the headline attraction, the 'Winter Dance Party' also featured the Big Bopper, Dion and Frankie Sardo. During the cold snowy early morning of 3 February, a light aircraft carrying Holly, the Bopper and Valens between gigs in Iowa and North Dakota crashed, killing all inside.

Valens' latin legacy

Ritchie Valens scored two posthumous hits in 1959, 'Little Girl' and 'Come On Little Susie', the latter a good rocker but very similar to 'Come On Let's Go'. Keene spread 33 Valens performances over four albums and an EP and managed to lease some of the same tracks to labels like Crown. One of the Del-Fi albums, *Ritchie Valens In Concert At Pacoima Jnr High*, was reputedly recorded by a fan and the music can only just be heard above the audience noise.

His other albums, including two reissue sets labelled *Greatest Hits*, did contain some fine music. There were several bluesy instrumental workouts between Valens and his session musicians, who included the New Orleans drummer Earl

Above: Ritchie autographs a hit single. Left: One of Valens' Greatest Hits *albums. Below left: Deputising on drums with Dion and the Belmonts.*

Palmer, Bill Pittman (bass) and Rene Hall (guitar). The instrumentals were really only session fillers, but proved noteworthy nonetheless. 'Ritchie's Blues' was a very slow basic blues but with a brushes and bongoes beat. 'Big Baby Blues' was in the Chuck Berry mould and 'Fast Freight' was a pacey guitar rocker with an unusual string-bass solo. Of the vocal tracks, 'Cry Cry Cry' was a good rocker and 'Hurry Up' was an Everlys-style message to a teenage girlfriend. The song was written by Sharon Sheeley and given to Valens by her fiancé, Eddie Cochran.

Most of the songs were credited as Valens originals. A few were blatant lifts, such as 'Ooh My Head' from Little Richard's 'Ooh My Soul'. A few, it must be said, were awful ballads, like 'Stay Beside Me', but most were effective rock'n'roll songs, uncomplicated but intense and with just enough latin flavour to be different. Ritchie Valens was hardly old enough to have assimilated too many influences in his music – what you hear is what he was. Whether, had he lived, he would have gone on to be a superstar or a discarded hero, the fact is that he had already made his mark by February 1959.

MARTIN HAWKINS

Ritchie Valens
Recommended Listening

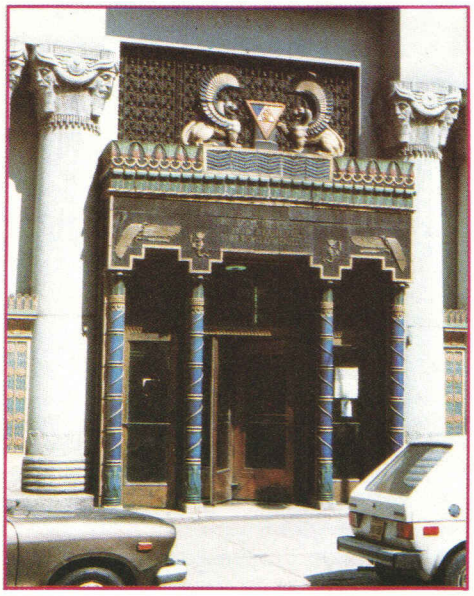
Ritchie (Del-Fi DFLP1206); *Ritchie Valens: His Greatest Hits* (London HA8196); *Ritchie Valens* (London HAR8535) (Includes: La Bamba, Bluebirds Over The Mountain, Stay Beside Me, Big Baby Blues, Cry Cry Cry, Ritchie's Blues, Now You're Gone, Hurry Up, Paddi-Wack Song, Come On Let's Go, Ooh My Head, Donna, Fast Freight, Little Girl, My Darlin' Is Gone, We Belong Together, That's My Little Susie, Rockin' All Night).

Shaping the Sounds of Success

The tribulations of rock recording in the Fifties

Audio Recorders Studio, Arizona, in November 1957: guitarist Duane Eddy has developed the technique of playing a lead guitar line on the bass strings of his instrument. Using a cleverly doctored amplifier, he has retained the power of the guitar even at low pitch and, with a small group, records a simple number entitled 'Movin'N'Groovin''. Lee Hazlewood, owner of the studio and producer of the session, feels that the recording has promise but requires something further to establish hit potential. Taking the tape to Goldstar Studios in Hollywood, where the equipment is far more sophisticated, he discovers (perhaps accidentally) that by halving the speed of the tape he achieves a far deeper and more distinctive sound with a longer echo. Subsequently he employs the legendary Plas Johnson to overdub a rasping saxophone solo. The record is released, enters the Top Hundred, and Duane Eddy's 'twang' is born. The follow-up 'Rebel Rouser' is similarly contrived. The basic track is made in Arizona, where a large grain silo doubles as an echo chamber; again the saxophone is overdubbed in Hollywood. This time the record is a Top Ten hit. There is now a demand for Eddy to tour, but there is, of course no group capable of reproducing the sound on stage.

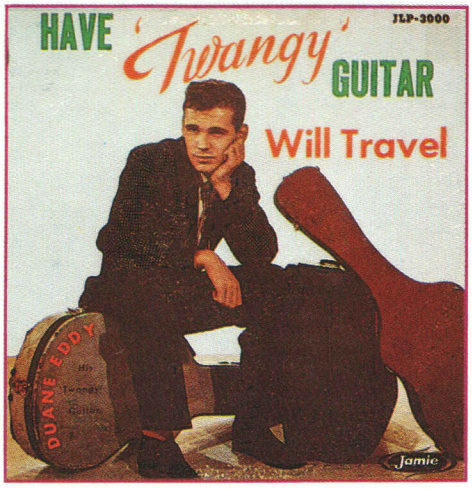
Was Duane Eddy thus the first star to be 'manufactured' in the recording studio? It would certainly be fair to say that he relied more than most on pure studio techniques for his success. The Duane Eddy 'sound' could not have existed without the possibilities first presented when the tape recorder, an invention of the late Forties, was introduced into recording studios in the early Fifties. Before this, recordings were cut direct on to acetate discs. At a typical jazz session in the Forties, for instance, a producer might have used just two microphones, and tracks were laid down in one continuous 'take', any mistake necessitating the re-



making of the entire number. With the tape recorder the process became not only more complicated but also more subtle and versatile.

The tape revolution

Apart from superior fidelity, the magnetic tape had three distinct advantages over the acetate disc. Firstly, it made possible 'overdubbing', a technique whereby a second track could be superimposed on the first without erasing the original. Secondly, editing could be achieved by cutting and splicing the tape. Errors could thus be removed and replaced by correct versions; a finished master could even be assembled using the best sections of a number of different 'takes'. Thirdly, recordings were no longer restricted by the length of one side of a gramophone disc, and a tape could be allowed to run throughout a session while the artists worked informally in an atmosphere conducive to spontaneous results. Used in conjunction with the tape recorder was the mixing board, through which the microphones could be channelled, balanced and mixed into a single monaural recording.



Opposite: A control room at Capitol Tower, Hollywood. Top left: The Pythian Temple, where 'Rock Around The Clock' was recorded. Top right: Bradley's Barn in Nashville launched Gene Vincent's recording career. Above: Duane Eddy with 'twangy' guitar. Below: Vincent and the Blue Caps at Capitol Tower in the studios they found so uncongenial.

These new developments were of crucial significance to the development of rock 'n'roll. Musicianship – in the old sense of the word – was no longer of paramount importance, since inferior playing or singing could, to a certain extent, be disguised by studio artifice such as editing or the use of echo machines. But beyond these basic devices, extreme sophistication of equipment was hardly necessary. Rock-'n'roll flourished primarily in the independent recording studios, often in a relaxed atmosphere free from Musicians' Union constraints. Many of the major companies leased tracks from the independents rather than using their own studios, which were usually better equipped. Such superiority, in the case of rock-'n'roll, did not guarantee success in terms of sales.

Boppin' in the Barn

Gene Vincent and the Blue Caps were one group who suffered as a result of a major company's basic lack of sympathy for rock'n'roll. They were signed to Capitol Records, but their first recording, 'Be-Bop-A-Lula', had been cut at Owen Bradley's Barn, an independent Nashville studio. Problems of balance caused by Vincent's quiet voice were overcome by shielding each band member with a circular 'baffle', and by placing Vincent himself in the lobby. As a result, although the guitar remained at full volume and the drums were thrashed mercilessly, Vincent's voice came through loud and clear. The record had immense power and remarkable separation of sound, and was a huge hit. Subsequently, the band learned to balance themselves but lost some of their impact in the process.

In 1957, Decca bought Bradley's Barn and Vincent was forced to record at the Capitol Tower in Hollywood, in Capitol's own studios. While the company, under A&R man Ken Nelson, had gained a formidable reputation for high fidelity recordings of big bands such as those of Stan Kenton or Nelson Riddle, their large stu-

dio was far from ideal for a small rockabilly outfit. Tucked away in the corner of a massive parquet-floored hall, the Blue Caps were simply lost. They were also far too loud for the engineers, and sound simply reverberated around the studio, losing focus and presence. Unlike Owen Bradley, Nelson could not recapture the dominant bass sound which was so essential to 'small group' rock'n'roll. As the quality of the Blue Caps' recordings declined, so too did their popularity.

At the other end of the scale, rock'n'roll was thriving in small, privately-owned studios. One of the most famous was Sam Phillips' Sun Record Company. The studio itself was little more than a 'hole in the wall' measuring 30 feet by 18. Equipment had been added as and when finances permitted, but was never very sophisticated in the early days of rock. Apart from an old acetate cutting machine on which records could be made privately at four dollars a time, Phillips owned five microphones, a mono mixing board and two recorders equipped with echo units.

With the liberal use of tape echo, first employed on Elvis Presley's 'That's All Right' in 1954, Phillips created what has become known as the 'Sun sound', as much a part of the legend as the artists themselves. Phillips liked the distant, haunting effect which could be created, but more practical reasons for the use of echo were those of overcoming the studio's naturally poor acoustics and of concealing rough edges in the actual performance.

Down in New Orleans, another sound was developing in Cosimo Matassa's J&M Studios. Whether by accident or design the limited range of sound balances available on the primitive equipment was ideal for the burgeoning New Orleans 'sound' as exemplified by such artists as Smiley Lewis and Fats Domino. The chunky unison riffing of guitar, bass and brass was filtered through the rudimentary mixing facilities to create an inimitable blend which proved commercially profitable. But because it was such a uniquely fortunate combination of men and machines, the New Orleans studio techniques were not to prove universally applicable.

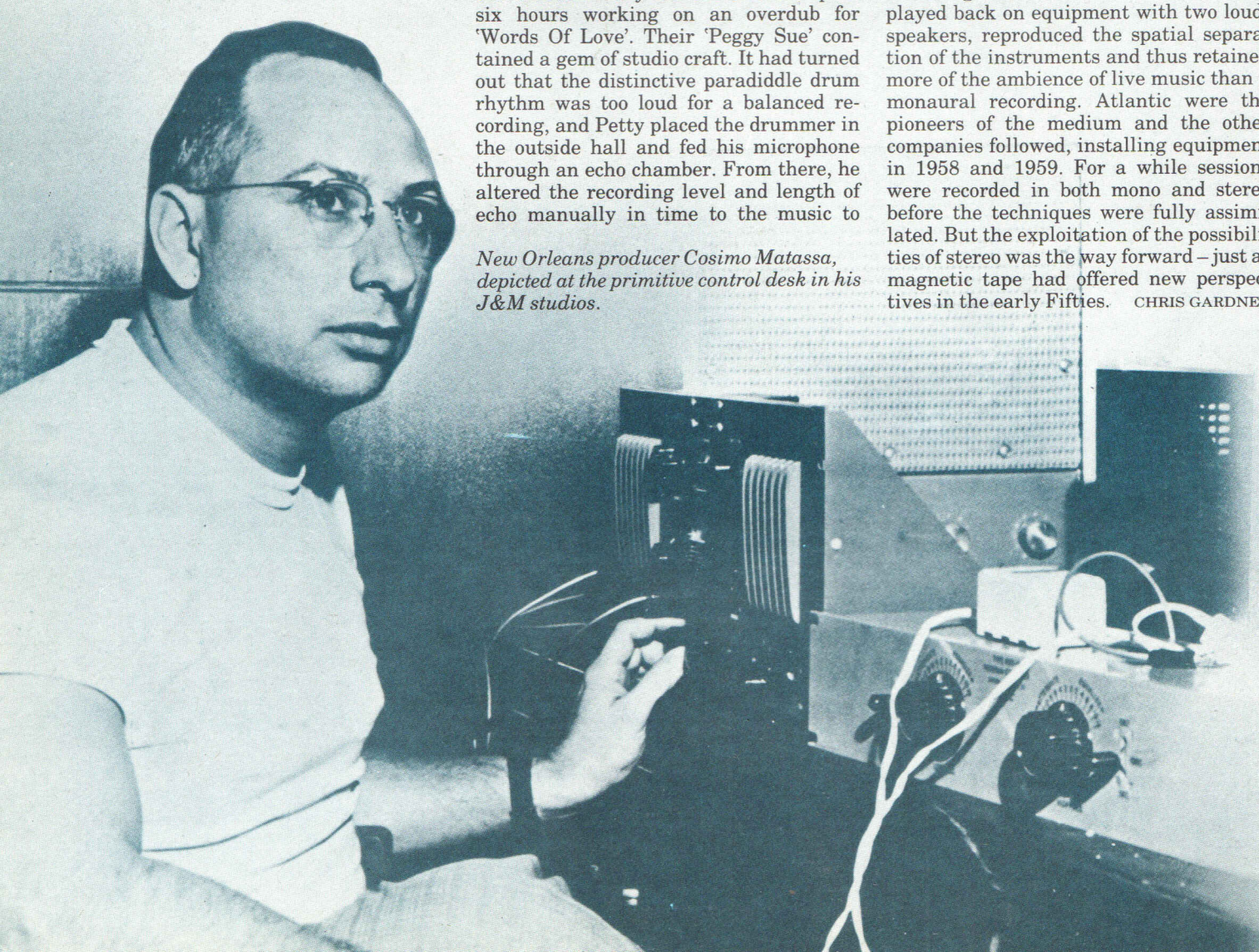
Pettys' innovations

Norman Petty was a performing artist in the early Fifties who had taken the unusual step of building his own studio in New Mexico. For an independent, it was exceptionally well-equipped, and Buddy Knox and Jimmy Bowen were among the musicians who recorded hits there. Petty's most famous artist, however, was Buddy Holly with his group, the Crickets. It was significant that Petty, unlike other studio owners, charged not by the hour but by the session. In theory a session could continue indefinitely at no extra cost; on one occasion Holly and the Crickets spent six hours working on an overdub for 'Words Of Love'. Their 'Peggy Sue' contained a gem of studio craft. It had turned out that the distinctive paradiddle drum rhythm was too loud for a balanced recording, and Petty placed the drummer in the outside hall and fed his microphone through an echo chamber. From there, he altered the recording level and length of echo manually in time to the music to achieve a hypnotic pulsing effect.

After Holly's untimely death in 1959, Coral records were able to satisfy demand for new recordings by taking songs Holly had recorded on a tape recorder in his apartment and then overdubbing backings under the supervision of studio engineer Jack Hansen. This was a new technique then; the backing musicians laid down their track while listening to Holly's original on headphones, after which a backing chorus was added. Because of the primitive methods used, a degree of sound quality was lost with each overdub.

At the end of the decade the most polished examples of studio craft were being recorded at Atlantic Records in New York. Their engineer, Tom Dowd, had gained them some fame for the clarity of his recordings in the early Fifties. The most remarkable of their contrived rock 'n'roll hits were those of the Coasters, produced by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller and engineered by Dowd. Frequently running to some 30 takes, their records required hours of painstaking editing and re-recording to achieve the desired effect, so important for their comic content.

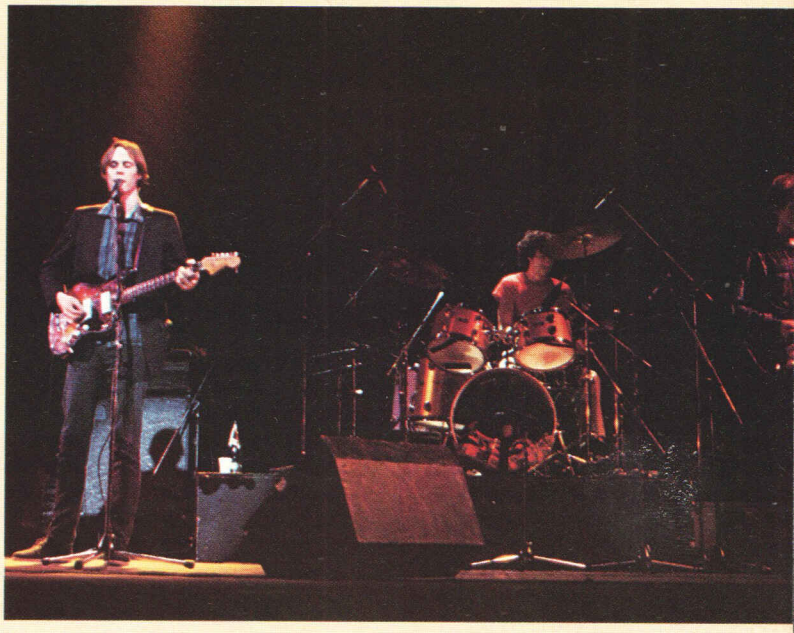
The last years of the decade saw the first commercial releases using stereophonic sound. Two separate sound sources could be recorded simultaneously and with correct positioning of microphones, a recording could be made which, when played back on equipment with two loudspeakers, reproduced the spatial separation of the instruments and thus retained more of the ambience of live music than a monaural recording. Atlantic were the pioneers of the medium and the other companies followed, installing equipment in 1958 and 1959. For a while sessions were recorded in both mono and stereo before the techniques were fully assimilated. But the exploitation of the possibilities of stereo was the way forward – just as magnetic tape had offered new perspectives in the early Fifties. CHRIS GARDNER



New Orleans producer Cosimo Matassa, depicted at the primitive control desk in his J&M studios.

THE GREAT MUSICIANS

Tom Verlaine



Verlaine with Television and (overleaf) playing Jazzmaster.

In 1977, the American New Wave hit Great Britain in the form of three different but exciting bands: Blondie, the Ramones and Television. Television's great asset was a music which matched the insistence of the fresh new sounds with an instrumental virtuosity far beyond the capabilities of their British rivals. And the man whose initials gave the band its name and whose guitar work became its trademark was Tom Verlaine.

Interestingly, Television's first concerts in the UK were as part of a tour with Blondie; groups led by two very different representatives of the New Wave. A lean figure in T-shirt, lank hair hanging over a high forehead and brows knitted over an old Fender Jazzmaster guitar, Verlaine could hardly be called a sex-symbol, especially in comparison with Debbie Harry. Television eschewed the then-popular guitar sound of crashing chords in favour of the jagged interplay of two guitars playing single lines. This produced a unique and often unsettling background for Verlaine's abrasive lead vocal. The band's music was, however, very much a part of the New Wave; each number seemed to build in logical and inevitable fashion to fiery guitar breaks – raw energy unleashed and, just as quickly, subdued. Television's measured, controlled passion playing material from their first LP *Marquee Moon* won over the sellout audiences on the band's first UK tour.

Much of the success of this first album is due to the tension created between Verlaine and second guitarist Richard Lloyd. Their dual guitars thread through the music without excessive repetition, save possibly in the playout to the title track. The melancholic phrasing on 'Torn Curtain', set against an almost plodding beat, is reminiscent of the playing of Fairport Convention's Richard Thompson, while the galloping solo on 'Prove It' recalls Neil Young's best instrumental work.

Television split after *Adventure*, a second album, had been released, and Verlaine struck out on his own. His first two albums utilised the same instrumental line-up – two guitars, bass and drums – as Television and have reflected a logical progression both in style and subject matter from Verlaine's earlier work. His playing, too, continues to impress: the instrumental 'The Blue Robe' on *Dreamtime*, Verlaine's second solo album, pits his incisive, keening runs against a convoluted, almost 'white reggae' backing to supply the most definite example of his style since 'Marquee Moon' itself.

Verlaine is quoted as saying, 'There are any number of ways to get from one place to another on the neck of the guitar that I don't know about', but this judgement of his technical capabilities seems over-modest – the assured upward runs and glissandi of his guitar work on 'Down On The Farm', also from *Dreamtime*, are clear examples of considerable ability. Verlaine's first instruments were saxophone and piano, and this seems to have encouraged an open and original approach to his guitar playing. His solos often build from a basic riff, introduced in the theme of the song, and extend this motif to the upper register over simple chording from the second guitarist. He also employs a more integrated style, involving soloing over a riff from his partner, with the two six-string guitars intermeshing to provide echoes of the Byrds' mid-Sixties sound.

Tom Verlaine used Fender amplification for live and studio work in his Television days, but has latterly used Ampeg gear. Certainly, the combination of Fender guitar and amp contributed much to the brilliant cutting sound which characterised the earlier recordings. Apart from the occasional flirtation with see-through Plexiglass guitars for stage work, he is most often seen with his trusty two-pickup Jazzmaster. With its staid, unfashionable image, the Jazzmaster is an unusual instrument for a rock lead guitarist; Elvis Costello is its only other well-known proponent. Verlaine makes effective, though judicious, use of the Jazzmaster's tremolo, particularly in conjunction with the bass strings, to add a final flourish to a phrase. Although influences on him are difficult to pinpoint, this use of tremolo in particular recalls Quicksilver Messenger Service's John Cipollina. Another San Francisco influence is Jorma Kaukonen of Jefferson Airplane, although Verlaine's playing makes little overt reference to the blues which formed an essential part of Kaukonen's style.

Rather than overdubbing a second guitar part to his solo LP tracks, Verlaine has used Ricky Wilson and Ritchie Fliegler as his recording partners, obviously gaining from the interplay between two guitarists. The sleeve credits to *Dreamtime*, however, read 'Tom Verlaine – Guitars, Solos and Vocals'; a prime requirement for a second guitarist in any future band is obviously the ability to remain firmly in the leader's shadow.

Tom Verlaine has been an important figure in the late-Seventies' New Wave. Evidence of his mercurial style can be found in such 'thinking' guitarists as John McGeoch of the Banshees and has echoes in the work of such British bands as the Scars and U2. His alignment to the New Wave was based to no little extent on his favoured lyrical themes of fear and alienation. The impression created is one of glimpses into the writer's private world, a trait which Verlaine shares with David Bowie, and it seemed no coincidence that Bowie covered 'Kingdom Come' from the *Tom Verlaine* album on his *Scary Monsters* LP. Verlaine's playing has been criticised in some quarters as being too clean and clinical – Television were billed as 'The Ice Kings of Rock' on their first UK tour – but his best work leaps from the speakers like sparks from a grindstone. Although he has had more success in the UK than his native land, Tom Miller (aka Verlaine) from Delaware has been one of the most influential figures in rock guitar of the Eighties. MICHAEL HEATLEY

THE HISTORY OF

Rock